2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

538 (201) monkey from the ground far below (see "The Buzzard and the Monkey" in Chapter 3), the audience shares the imbalance and giddiness that the monkey feels. With varying degrees of animation, the teller can, like the writer, hypnotize his listeners and compel them to suspend any disbelief and fully participate in the events of the tale. But unlike the written word, which can be enjoyed in solitude, whenever and for however long the reader may wish, effective oral presentation is dependent on many factors that are peripheral to the tale itself. The occasion on which a tale is told, the audience to which it is told, and the style and technique of the person doing the telling, among other factors, cannot be ignored in attempting to read written versions of tales which are meant to be presented orally. These external forces are as much a part of oral literature as character development and tightly knit plot are of written literature.

The Setting

538 179 The Sea Island tradition has been to tell tales (called "lies" by the islanders) as a form of entertainment. The advent of bridges and electricity, however, has brought about significant changes in the occasions for telling folktales. On more remote islands storytelling is still a common practice, and it is still fairly easy to get a "telling" started. On the more industrialized islands television, with its talking pictures, has all but eliminated the need for oral literature as a form of entertainment. Yet, given the choice, most children seem to favor human contact with a person who really knows how to perform a tale over being entertained by television.

538 •517 (170) In Africa and on the Sea Islands folktelling is an informal social event with no set place for telling or listening to tales. Any place where people often congregate to talk, or just to sit and listen, is a good place for a telling to begin. I collected some tales under trees, in open fields, riding in the back of pickup trucks, and while shark fishing. Others I obtained at island stores, around fire sites, at juke joints, in front of fireplaces, on front porches, and down on the creek banks. I heard still others in the comfort and privacy of the tellers' homes. All but the last were places where people congregated and the teller had enough people for an audience response.

On rainy days, which are prevalent on the islands owing to their

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

subtropical location, one can find men, women, and children sitting in kitchens smelling the welcome aroma of "hoppin John and bone" cooking in a pot or just sitting, smoking pipes (men and women smoke pipes on the Sea Islands), and watching the torrential rain beat against the windowpanes. The best stories I collected on the Sea Islands and in Africa, however, were ones I heard at night in front of the fireplaces when all the daily tasks were completed, supper had been served, the children had been bathed, and everyone was relaxed, content, and gazing into the open fire. The fire had a hypnotic effect, and one's imagination could easily see forms amid the light and shadows of the flames while one listened to the teller unravel his tale.

During the cold season on the Sea Islands (*harmattan* in Africa), yams (or *ji*, the Igbo name for a kind of potato) are often covered with the hot coals of the fire, baked, and offered as refreshments to the entertainer, who never seems to fail to make his tale more pleasing as a result. Gin, homemade brews, and other warming drinks are often passed around if there is a good group of tellers and listeners. In Igbo, Yoruba, and Ibebio villages fresh palm wine, chilled or served at room temperature, and cola nuts are always welcome refreshments during storytelling times.

Though everyone is potentially capable of telling a tale, I soon learned that not everyone can tell a *good* tale. Sea Island informants with whom I spent much time over several years often attempted to tell stories only in an effort to help me along with my work. Others felt a strong need to compensate me for coming such a long way to talk to them or to hear their stories. Thus they made efforts to tell tales even when the occasion was not conducive for a telling to begin. In this situation the teller was often tense, rushed, and unprepared to do his best; the tale would often be confused, lacking in plot, and generally uninteresting. But it is well known among the islanders and the Nigerians who the good storytellers are, and after some time I was directed to those tellers well known for their performances of the oral traditions and gifted in the oral technique. In the words of one of the islanders, "some people de gift for lie." The world *lie* has more than one denotation on the Sea Islands: it not only means that one is not telling the truth; it is also a term associated with any kind of fictional tale told primarily for entertainment.

There are certain cultural taboos associated with Sea Island storytelling. More men than women tell tales. Men are expected to be

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

592 593 mealtimes and then returned to her own home. Since her death, his granddaughter has continued the practice.

538 Another elderly friend and informant often sat in the hallway of his shanty, with the front and back doors open to let the breeze flow through the house, and told of Ber Rabbit and times past in vivid detail. Sometimes it seemed that Ber Rabbit was indeed a real character to him, one he had actually encountered and greeted on his many journeys down Sea Island paths.

538 179 The Sea Island children are aware of the "old-time stories" such as those about Ber Rabbit and his many companions, but most under the age of twelve told me stories that they had learned in school, and not those characteristic of the Sea Island tradition. Television and improved educational facilities account in part for this change. However, the skill in telling and the ability to retain the old-time stories appear to be related to the degree of modernization of the island. On the more remote islands, including Wadmalaw and Daufuski, many children are avid and skillful storytellers in the old tradition.

538 859 171 Nonetheless, few Sea Island children between the ages of eight and twelve can match the skill and intricate detail in description that the Igbo, Yoruba, and Ibebio children display in captivating an audience and unraveling a tale. Though color television is a common sight in Nigerian cities like Lagos, Aba, Owerri, Calabar, and Eket, the village children are far less likely to have access to television or radio. As would be expected, these children are far more expert in the art of telling a story than even Nigerian city children, probably because village children are still gathered and told stories frequently as a form of entertainment.

538 517 461 Anytime was a good time for the African children to tell stories. But, as on the Sea Islands, the best stories were told in the late evening around the fire sites when a good group had come together to relax and be entertained after the activities of the day were ended.

The Audience

596 Today, as noted earlier, the extended family is still a practiced tradition on the Sea Islands. The inhabitants, like their West African forebears, seem to be communal people. They live in close proximity

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

159 538 whether held at Mr. Ted's store or in the clearing under the big Angel Oak tree behind her trailer. As noted before, Miss Myma always told the first tale at a preplanned storytelling, as a way of sanctioning the event. Really not much of a storyteller, she was more relaxed when a group of her "nipping" friends decided to tell "lies" at her house than at gatherings at Mr. Ted's store. The huge Angel Oak, with its ghostly hanging moss, shaded the ground so grass would not grow around it and thus helped to provide a clean, insect-free surface on which to relax. It also served as an anchor for Miss Myma's many respectable and some not-so-respectable friends, a place to sit, smoke, take little nips, and catch the breeze throughout the day. By late afternoon, when her respectable friends had long since gone to return to jobs, see about the children, or attend to chores, her not-so-respectable friends, not having to be responsible to anyone or anything, would settle in and ready themselves to tell lies throughout the night. Miss Myma's sleeping times remain a source of fascination for me. I could never understand how she managed to get up so early and go to bed so late. But then, many of the islanders are night people, roaming the highways, dancing, listening to music, and visiting friends in the dark. There were, however, occasions when Miss Myma actually got up and went to bed, leaving her friends still nipping under the oak.

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159 123 In the winter of 1976 Miss Myma finally agreed to come to Michigan to visit me. She would not consent to fly; she would come only if I sent her a Greyhound bus ticket. I sent her the ticket and was delighted that she actually did come, and even more delighted that she would stay for three weeks. It was horribly cold in Michigan that year; Miss Myma did not care to go outside, and cared even less for the nine-degree-below-zero temperature and the mounds of snow. She preferred the warmth and comfort of sitting by the fireplace in our den, smoking her pipe. I was glad that we had a fireplace, and especially happy when she looked into the fire and began to reminisce and tell my two young children tales of Ber Rabbit. She gave them an oral tradition of tales in those three weeks that could not be matched with a lifetime of written literature. They were utterly fascinated by her. She knew my three-year-old daughter well not only because I had taken her with me to visit the Sea Islands but because on one of those occasions my daughter, who is asthmatic, had a severe attack around three in the morning. I had used all of her medicine, and there are no drugstores on Wadmalaw Island. Miss Myma observed her labored breathing for a while, and

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Janie Hunter

STORIES

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(533)
(524)
(538)

When we was small, we didn't 'low to go no place, but we have all we fun at home. On weekend when we do all work what told to us and after we finish work at night, we sit down and we all sing different old song, and parents teach us different game and riddles. We go and cut the wood and wrap up the house with green oak and muckle wood, then we all stays by the fire chimbley and listen to stories.

512 505 (574) neighbor in the hospital of a nearby town. Young men sometimes go across the water again for recreation in town. Young women usually cannot drive either a boat or a car and are dependent upon some male family member for transportation if they wish to go into town for similar reasons. Electricity 365 came to the island in 1964 and changed the habits of the islanders considerably. Today television provides a major 207 source of recreation for most families in the evenings. • 517 Children of ten and eleven watch it many hours in the afternoons and evenings. 206 Telephones have been available since 1972. Some children engage in frequent and lengthy conversations with their mainland friends after school. A new boat 504 landing is scheduled for completion in 1977, which will be 505 large enough to accommodate a ferry. With its completion, reliance on small motor boats will be phased out and mainlanders will have easier access to the island. When the ferry becomes operational, it is probable that the community will become much less of a closed community in important ways.

512 Weekends are reserved for the major social activities (438) of the community. Saturdays are devoted to shopping for (574) major supplies in town, or for entertaining mainland visitors and relatives. The major social event of the week is the 512 Sunday morning church service. Most islanders walk two or 796 three miles to the major church at the center of the island. (493) A few families keep four-wheeled vehicles on the island, and 491 older residents ride in these. Roads on the island are sandy

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

533 belong in the plantation tradition. They have studied the
178 spirituals long and carefully at first hand, have learned
814 them orally from groups of Negro plantation singers, and sing them seriously, feelingly, and sympathetically. Students of Negro music who know the facts are unanimous in the opinion that their rendition is accurate, dignified, and artistic."

533 The second influence came from a movement to get the
178 Negroes themselves to see the racial importance and native
517 worth of the spirituals and hence to continue to sing them, instead of discarding them as something vaguely to be ashamed of, in favor of printed collections of the white race.

(871) This influence has been particularly effective on St. Helena Island, through the instrumentality of the Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School, which has exerted an extensive influence on the large Negro population of that island." In regard to the spirituals, the most important result, next to the continued singing of the spirituals by the island Negroes, is the recent publication of the words and music of 113 of the finest low-country spirituals."

533 This is the work of N. G. J. Ballanta, himself a Negro from Sierra Leone. Possessing as he does both musical scholarship and a native African background, he is unusu-

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(179) "Following are two interesting opinions on the subject of the white people's singing of spirituals. The latter opinion is the more accurate: "Carl Van Vechten writing in *Vanity Fair* about these songs declared it as his opinion that white singers cannot sing them, and that women, with few exceptions, should not attempt to sing them at all. . . . . I agree that white singers are, naturally, prone to go to either of two extremes: to attempt to render a Spiritual as though it were a Brahm's song, or to assume a 'Negro unctuousness' that is obviously false, and painfully so. I think white singers, concert singers, *can* sing Spirituals—if they *feel* them." Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, pp. 28, 29.

Compare the remark of a Negro woman quoted by Miss McKim (*Slave Songs of the United States*, XXIII) concerning how a spiritual should be sung: "It can't be sung widout a *full heart and a troubled sperrit*."

(162) "St. Helena has a population of approximately 4,000 Negroes and 60 white people. The Penn School, founded during the War Between the States, was the first school for Negroes in the South supported by Northern funds. It has been brought to a high degree of efficiency by Miss Rossa B. Cooley, who went there in 1903. It dominates the island settlement and has had a tremendous influence upon it, so much so that the St. Helena Negroes are considerably above their racial average in most ways.

"*St. Helena Island Spirituals*, G. Schirmer, Inc., 1925.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

be recognized as African. However, the æsthetic taste of the race, which expressed itself in Africa in ceremonial dances, in song, and in carvings, had less opportunity for expression in the utilitarian lives led by the slaves.

Olmstead reports that "it is interesting to find in what ways the creative instinct continued to manifest itself," and goes on to quote a prominent Virginia planter as saying that his Negroes "never worked so hard as to tire themselves—always were lively and ready for a frolic at night." As in Africa, every possible piece of work was done to song; and it probably did not take the slave-owners long to discover that the output was greater when leaders with a gift for rhythm were appointed to regulate the work of gangs of laborers. Nor is it surprising that the slaves were expert blacksmiths, when it is remembered that Africa since time immemorial has worked in iron. Her deposits were so rich and so near the surface that comparatively simple methods were required to make the ore available. On this account certain tribes have always been skilled in iron-work, and the reason for the excellence of the famous grilles, balconies, and railings made by the slaves of New Orleans is obvious.

George D. Lowe, editor of the *Baxley Banner*, tells of a Georgia slave who could take a blackgum log and cut from it a perfect screw for the old-type cotton press, and also cut the opposite thread for the follower block—all this without laying out a line on the log, just using his eye. Mr. Lowe says: "There was another Negro slave owned in Twiggs county who was a famous stairbuilder, and his owner rented him out to men building fine homes as far away as Mississippi. . . . I have heard it said that he built at least one hundred stairways, never using a plan, but producing curved lines that no modern builder has approached in graceful beauty." At Incachee Plantation there is a wrought-iron basket made by a colored blacksmith for holding flaming fat-wood (pine) knots. I am covetous every time I see it. And in the plant of the Brunswick Marine Company, I am told, there are several mechanics trained in the old school who show unusual skill in metal-work.

During the last depression, when there was no work for the Negro cabinet-makers and carpenters, whittling was the inevitable pastime for Willy Rogers, of Darien and Lonnie Davis, of St. Simon's. (Illustrations 20 and 21.) Both made a number of canes which were ornamented with alligators climbing their length. These wood carvings are obviously in line with West African tradition, and indicate that the sculptor's art is only dormant in the race. Given leisure enough to eat, and greater respect for his own mode of expression, the Negro might again take to the

A. [For Illustrations 20 & 21, see Categories 326 & 322, plate facing p. 113--Analyst]

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

461 517 forms of art in which his African forebears excelled. However, it must be kept in mind that *Art for Art's* sake never existed in the life of the African natives. Their dances and their music were not separated from daily life, and until about 1900 this [177] attitude persisted among our Negroes in the rural sections. Now it is the fashion to imitate the white man, and the results are unspeakably dull.

533 19 Survivals, such as these I mention, have come to light—more or less as a side issue—in searching for links connecting the dances and songs of our Georgia Negroes with those of the African natives. As far as the songs are concerned, it would be gratifying to be able to say definitely what proportion of African influence is shown and what should be attributed to America. Unfortunately the methods of research employed today by most musicologists do not produce results that can be considered reliable. I would not accept as authoritative the findings of an anthropologist who based his conclusions concerning the African food tabu found in Georgia on what he learned from me. And I am no more willing to accept the word of the musicologist who depends on transcriptions found in books, and on inadequate phonograph records, to decide what the slave music owes to Europe.

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In my experience transcriptions and records are both too susceptible to the biased interpretation of musicians trained in the European idiom. Far too many know nothing about African music, and do not care to learn anything about it at first-hand from the ex-slaves and their children. When they stop voicing the suspicion that the Negro spirituals derived their syncopation from Europe, probably from the Scottish folksong—then, and not before, shall I be ready to take their pronouncements seriously.

African Songs

533 191

FREEWILLUM

James Rogers (born in Liberty County) tells me this song, and the one following, were sung by Dublin Scribben. To use his own words: "Ole man Dublin he belong' to de Andersons o' Sunbury an' every day or two Miss Bertha would sen' me ober fo' him—to talk de ole African talk. I heered him, but I was too small to remember what he said, but I remember de songs 'cause I always p'int it on my mind about de t'ing." [81]

[179] The first song did not sound like English, but when Rogers divorced the words

[81] *Tunes mean far more to the Negroes than words, I notice, and are not easily forgotten.*

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

175 527 Decoration Day was the one occasion of the year when all of St. Helena paid a visit to Beaufort, where there was always a ceremony at National Cemetery. "The Thirtieth of May," said a native of St. Helena, born in the early days of freedom, "was a day that I looked for [*sic*] to happiness. Early in the morning work was suspended and nearly all the people on the Island went to Beaufort. I can now recall how I used to watch with interest the great crowd that used to pass by our house from the other end of the Island on the eve of Decoration in order to be over in town before the rush. We had to cross a ferry then and the accommodation was not very good."[84] [505]

[517] The people of St. Helena celebrated the First of January not so much as New Year's Day as the anniversary of their freedom, for it was January 1, 1863, that President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. Here again the celebration was at Corner Store. Brass bands, perhaps one hired for the occasion and another composed of members of one of the fraternal orders, furnished music for the day. On a platform erected in a grove of trees, speakers, usually chosen from among their own people, addressed an attentive audience upon the benefits arising from freedom.

175 517 The freedmen had no sports as did the whites in the rural districts. They still fished as in slavery days and could now hunt when they chose, but they did not know how to play together in combative sports. Yet they were 175 181 a good-natured, contented people, happy in their freedom, ignorant in their isolation, suspicious of all "foreigners," but gentle and courteous when once this suspicion had been

[84] MS, "St. Helena." In files of Penn School.